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SUBJECT: DAILY SUMMARY OF JAPANESE PRESS 02/03/09

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ARTICLES:

(1) War on terror in Afghanistan: Reconstruction a key to victory;
Military might does not guarantee victory

YOMIURI (Page 6) (Excerpts)
February 3, 2009

Afghanistan has resurfaced as a major international security issue following the U.S. Obama administration's announcement to put high priority on the war on terror in that country. Although the Obama administration intends to overwhelm the Taliban in Afghanistan by sending more troops to that country, the Taliban's bizarre tactics have exposed the limits of armed force.

In an interview with the Yomiuri Shimbun, NATO Supreme Allied Commander in Europe John Craddock, who sits at the top of the chain

of command of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF), said: "It is impossible to achieve a victory by military means alone." The commander indicated that sending more troops to Afghanistan would not result in the elimination of Taliban insurgents in that country.

The commander regards activities by the provincial reconstruction teams (PRTs) that can make up for the shortfall of military operations as the key to victory. Civilians, including diplomats, are organized into small teams or PRTs to improve infrastructure, such as power generation, irrigation, transportation, and education under the protection of troops stationed in Afghanistan. The Japanese government, too, announced in January its intention to send personnel to serve on a PRT.

Multinational force pins hope on Japan dispatching transport helicopters

A shortage of transport helicopters is a serious problem for foreign forces in Afghanistan.

A helicopter pilot of the Dutch force stationed at ISAF Kandahar Air Base flew 120 hours in a period of two and a half months -- equivalent to a regular workload of 10 months. ISAF is still in serious need of transport helicopters.

Helicopters transport troops, arms and ammunition, construction materials, food and other supplies.

High demand for transport choppers results from frequent attacks on

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overland transportation by Taliban insurgents and bandits, in addition to the precipitous terrain in Afghanistan. According to an NATO headquarters source, there is an informal report that some 20 PERCENT of transport trucks via Pakistan have been attacked.

Large transport helicopters, Mi-26s, possessed by a Russian air transport company are also stationed at Kandahar Air Base. It took a lot of effort on the part of ISAF to convince the Afghanistan and Russian governments. Having been invaded by Russia in the past, Russian military helicopters flying into in Afghanistan involved some delicate political problems. There was no other option, however.

Last fall, Japan was informally asked by the U.S. government to dispatch transport helicopters to Afghanistan. ISAF Urzgan Province force command Col. Case Mathijesen (TN: phonetic) said: "We will welcome Japan's Chinooks with open arms."

The colonel served as Dutch force command in the southern Iraqi city of Samawah in 2004 in which the Dutch force worked closely with Japan's Ground Self-Defense Force. Comparing the situation in Samawah to that in Afghanistan's southern area, he noted: "In terms of terrain and the level of threats, Afghanistan is far more difficult (than Iraq)."

(2) Aso now conscious about public support

ASAHI (Page 4) (Slightly abridged)
February 3, 2009

In the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), Prime Minister Aso used to rely on advice by Diet Affairs Committee Chairman Tadamori Oshima, his friend, but he has begun to count on advice from another "aide," Election Strategy Council Deputy Chairman Yoshihide Suga. While listening to Suga's advice, Aso is becoming sensitive about public support of his cabinet. In the New Komeito, Deputy President Junji Higashi, who comes from Fukuoka Prefecture, Aso's electoral district, and his old friend, has begun to play the role of intermediary between the LDP and the New Komeito.

Shift of emphasis to Kuga's strategy

Former State Minister in Charge of Economic and Fiscal Policy Heizo Takenaka showed up in a luncheon that Aso attended with business

leaders after the Davos Conference in Switzerland on Jan. 31. Aso places emphasis on fiscal disbursements, while Takenaka stresses the need for structural reform. They seem to be as incompatible as oil and water, but on Jan. 22, they exchanged views at the Prime Minister's Office, surprising Aso's aides. Suga persuaded a reluctant Aso to meet Takenaka.

Suga supported Aso in the LDP presidential election last fall, though he is not a longtime supporter of him. Aso began to listen to his explanation of the circumstances surrounding the next House of Representatives election on a regular basis, focusing on his expertise of charting strategy.

Suga has placed emphasis, in drawing up a strategy for the Aso administration after the fiscal 2009 budget is enacted, on recovering popularity ratings.

At Aso's private residence in Kamiyama-cho, Tokyo, on Jan. 3, Suga,

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who was across the table filled with traditional Japanese New Year's foods, told Aso: "Let us pour our all energy into measures to buoy up the economy in the upcoming regular Diet session. If we manage to pass the budget bill successfully, public support of the administration will naturally rise. In such a case, the government will be able to do anything, including reforming the party or dissolving the Lower House." Suga told those around him on another occasion: "If the public support rate after the budget passes through the Diet is at a 30 PERCENT level, the government will find it possible to dissolve the Lower House anytime."

Aso had assumed the posture of not caring about public support ratings. Frequently citing his grandfather, Shigeru Yoshida, whose support rates remained low but whose historical evaluation remained high, he once said: "A 5 PERCENT support rate is enough." Based on his instinctive dislike of becoming sensitive to public support ratings, Aso has proposed raising the consumption tax.

Recently, however, Aso has taken action apparently aimed to boost public support.

Prime Minister Aso handed a trophy over to the victorious sumo wrestler, Asashoryu, at the Kokugikan in Ryogoku on Jan. 25, apparently keeping in mind Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi's handing a trophy to Takanohana, saying, "I was impressed." At that time, Aso had criticized Koizumi's political approach as populism. Those who know Aso said that the appearance at the Kokugikan of Aso, who is not particularly interested in sumo, goes against what he has usually said.

Aso also attended the Davos Conference in an attempt to draw public attention, but it was also Suga who made arrangements for his Davos visit.

Meanwhile, Oshima is moving away from Aso gradually. Aso and Oshima both served as deputy secretary general of the opposition LDP and jointly mapped out a policy platform in 1993. Since then, they have gone along with each other. Oshima voted for Aso in all the four party presidential elections in which Aso filed his candidacy, beginning with the election in 2001.

Last fall, Aso agreed to accept Suga's view in favor of dissolving the Diet when all Lower House members' terms of office expire, instead of Oshima's call, echoed by New Komeito Secretary General Kazuo Kitagawa, for a general election in November. Attributing the further drops in Aso's popularity ratings to the postponement of dissolution of the Lower House, Oshima regrettably said: "It could not be helped, because he listened to what his friend said."

After accepting Oshamas proposal for putting off submitting the second supplementary budget bill in the extraordinary Diet session last year, public support of the Aso cabinet plunged further. Oshima then advised Aso last year to reorganize his cabinet in order to deal with an expected difficult situation as a result of the postponement of Diet dissolution, but Aso did not accept his advice.

New Komeito Higashi as new go-between

Cited another key point in Aso drawing up a dissolution strategy is to maintain good relations with the New Komeito.

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At a Chinese restaurant in the Hotel Okura on Dec. 30, Prime Minister Aso dined with Junji Azuma. Aso has frequently met with Junji Higashi recently.

Encouraged by Azuma, Higashi said: "Where has the Taro Aso who mingled with the geeks in Akihabara gone? In dealing with the unemployment issue, you should hear opinions directly from employees and workers," Aso reportedly replied: "Although we've known each other for a long time, I hear this nice advice from you for the first time."

Azuma, who cannot be dubbed as an elite in the Soka Gakkai, a religious group supporting the New Komeito, began to act as intermediary between Aso and the New Komeito when friction appeared last fall over the issue of whether to put off dissolving the Diet.

Kitagawa had been expected to act as go-between. But since he failed to predict the postponement of the election in November, voices of discontent also grew louder in the Soka Gakkai.

The New Komeito can no longer misread the timing for the Lower House to be dissolved. Under this situation, the party singled out Higashi Azuma as mediator. For Aso, Azuma, familiar to him, was suitable as advisor on managing his damaged administration.

Cooperation with Suga of the LDP and Higashi of the New Komeito may facilitate mutual understanding between both ruling parties, but they have weak political bases in their respective parties. This means that the protection effort from moves to drive Aso out of office might be undermined.

If public support of the government stays low in the run-up to the expiration of all Lower House members' terms of office in September, a call for moving up a party presidential election will inevitably gain influence in the LDP. But Aso has yet to prepare a scenario to raise public support rating and dismiss the nightmare of the prime minister pressed to resign before the next Lower House election.

(3) Japan-U.S. alliance and Ozawa problem

SANKEI (Page 13) (Full)
January 31, 2009

By Keiichiro Nakashizu, deputy chief editorial writer

High government officials of Japan and the United States have advocated a policy of strengthening the bilateral alliance as if to exchange words of encouragement.

At her confirmation hearing with the U.S. Senate Foreign Relations Committee on Jan. 13, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton said: "Our alliance with Japan is a cornerstone of American policy in Asia, essential to maintain peace and prosperity in the Asia-Pacific region."

In his policy speech at the Diet on Jan. 28, Prime Minister Taro Aso, too, stated: "I together with President Barack Obama will further strengthen our alliance with the United States."

However, neither Clinton nor Aso specifically referred to how they would reinforce the bilateral alliance. The reason is because they cannot hammer out substantive contents.

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Approximately 50,000 troops from 41 countries, including the NATO

(North Atlantic Treaty Organization) countries, have taken part in the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in Afghanistan, to which the United States is expected to send more troops. Japan, however, has yet to decide on whether to dispatch its Self-Defense Forces (SDF) personnel. This is the reason for Tokyo and Washington to avoid referring to measures for Afghanistan.

It is believed that the sharing of risk is essential for an alliance. Japan tries to fend off bearing risk and costs as much as possible.

It is difficult for Japan to find 'safe areas,' which is a precondition for sending SDF troops to Afghanistan. The government's interpretation of the Constitution does not allow (SDF personnel) to use weapons 'to eliminate actions to obstruct their operations, which is included in the United Nations' weapons-use standards. The government's rational reason is that that might become the same as the use of weapons prohibited by Article 9 of the Constitution. Although the United Nations' policing activities do not fall under that category, the government does not accept it. The Japan-U.S. alliance has lost substance due to Tokyo's safety-first policy and unrealistic interpretation of the Constitution.

However, political incompetence has prevented reviewing the safety-first policy and constitutional interpretation.

In his speech delivered on Jan. 14 at the Japan National Press Club, then U.S. Ambassador to Japan Thomas Schieffer expressed a strong sense of alarm about such a situation. He gave a warning, noting:

"The bilateral alliance should not be used as a tool for a political fight (between the Liberal Democratic Party and the Democratic Party of Japan). With its political chaos, Japan could be isolated in the international community."

The situation appears to be becoming more serious. The political turmoil could expand. The reason is that if a DPJ-led coalition government is inaugurated, there is a possibility that the Japan-U.S. alliance will be changed.

Last November, DPJ President Ichiro Ozawa revealed his view on the Japan-U.S. alliance in explaining his party members the reason for the failure of his talks with Prime Minister Yasuo Fukuda on the formation of an LDP-DPJ coalition. He said:

"SDF overseas dispatches for international peace cooperation are limited to UN-led activities based on resolutions adopted by the UN Security Council or UN General Assembly. Therefore, our operation."

Ozawa said that Fukuda had made a commitment to this. Although it remains unclear whether it was true or not, Ozawa said:

"In order to establish principles for our country's international peace cooperation, drastically shifting our country's unprincipled security policy, I judged the (talks with Fukuda) would worthy of initiating policy consultations."

However, there are still remaining issues to be hammered out. In the case of a contingency involving Taiwan, the UN will not function

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because of China's exercising its veto. Even if U.S. military is mobilized, the SDF will not be able to cooperate with them under Ozawa's principles. If that is the case, the Japan-U.S. alliance will not work. Adversely, Ozawa's way of thinking could force the SDF to use weapons.

Ozawa, meanwhile, in a question-and-answer session last October in the Lower House, said: "My party will build stronger Japan-U.S. relations by forming an equal partnership with Washington." Asked about the meaning of an equal partnership, Ozawa responded: "As long as Japan follows whatever America says, Japan will not be an ally of America."

As if to demonstrate this, Ozawa last year opposed a new special

agreement on Japan's financial burdens for costs for the U.S. forces stationed in Japan. The DPJ's Okinawa vision compiled last summer calls for revising the Japan-U.S. Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA) and relocating the U.S. Marine Corps Futenma Air Station outside the prefecture or the country. The vision overturns the conventional agreement between Japan and the United States.

When told by the DPJ that it would suspend Japan's refueling mission and move to review the SOFA if it took political power, Joseph Nye, a former assistant defense secretary, last December in Tokyo said: "I will take it as an anti-American government."

However, nobody knows Ozawa's real intention. Because he had said before joining the DPJ: "The Japan-U.S. alliance is a lifeline for Japan." If the DPJ takes the reins of power, there would be a change in Ozawa. The Ozawa problem will bear down on Japan. Both Ozawa and Prime Minister Aso should clarify how they will operate the Japan-U.S. alliance.

In the government poll on foreign policy conducted last year, 73 PERCENT of respondents said that they had friendly feelings toward America. The figures prove that many Japanese think that Japan's alliance with the United States is significant. Making the Japan-U.S. alliance to function will lead to protecting national interests and the benefits of the people.

(4) TOP HEADLINES

Asahi:

MAFF mulls allowing rice producers to opt for output adjustment with government subsidy

Mainichi:

Ratio of accepting pregnant women in emergency at perinatal centers across Japan varies

Yomiuri:

Softbank Mobile eyes fixed-rate wireless data communication service via tie-up with Emobile

Nikkei:

Seven & I in talks with J. Front Retailing on selling Sogo's flagship store

Sankei:

North Korea's preparations for Taepodong launch confirmed by U.S. satellites

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Tokyo Shimbun:

Somalia anti-piracy mission: Defense Ministry not to allow MSDF to join multinational forces to avoid use of force

Akahata:

JCP Secretariat Head Ichida calls for policy shift in Upper House interpellation

(5) EDITORIALS

Asahi:

- (1) Education essential to prevent drug use
- (2) Chinese economy: Exports no longer the driving force

Mainichi:

- (1) Job offers to graduating students must not be cancelled
- (2) Vocational education must not be left to schools

Yomiuri:

- (1) Government must introduce single number system
- (2) Mt. Asama erupts

Nikkei:

- (1) NHK's 24-hour English news service
- (2) Iraq takes step forward

Sankei:

- (1) National Personnel Authority's resistance to civil servant system reform absurd
- (2) Prime minister's Davos speech: Ability to implement policies must be demonstrated in support for Asia

Tokyo Shimbun:

- (1) Sumo wrestler Wakakirin fired due to drug use
- (2) Greater efforts for reconciliation and independence must follow Iraq election

Akahata:

- (1) Prime Minister Aso fails to accept blame and show remedies in Diet interpellations

(6) Prime Minister's schedule, February 2

NIKKEI (Page 2) (Full)
February 3, 2009

07:45

Took a walk around his official residence.

10:01

Attended an Upper House plenary session.

12:11

Met at the Kantei with Election Strategy Council Chairman Koga and Deputy Chairman Suga.

13:16

Returned to the Upper House plenary session.

16:00

Attended a Lower House plenary session.

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16:16

Met Economic and Fiscal Policy Minister Yosano, Assistant Deputy Chief Cabinet Secretary Fukuda, and others. Yosano stayed behind.

17:03

Attended an LDP executive meeting.

17:42

Met Reform Implementation Office Head Takebe at party headquarters.

18:12

Met at the Kantei with METI Vice Minister Mochizuki, Economy and Industry Policy Bureau Director General Matsunaga, and Natural Resources and Energy Agency Director General Ishida. Followed by Chief Secretary General Kawamura and Deputy Chief Cabinet Secretary Uruma. Kawamura stayed behind.

19:37

Met with Deputy Chief Cabinet Secretary Konoike at a pub in the Imperial Hotel.

21:54

Returned to his official residence.

ZUMWALT